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Dear Reader:

The book you are holding in your hands is emblematic of the great contradiction that confronts the student of Poland's place in the history of World War II in general, and of the Holocaust in particular.

At its basic level, this period in the story of this beleaguered country is one of almost unmitigated tragedy. No country lost a greater percentage of its population due to the war, and no other country has ever experienced a more total genocide of one of its constituent peoples. Under the twin invasions of Hitler's and Stalin's forces, many millions of Poles perished, and the Nazis targeted in particular Poland's Jewish population – Europe's largest concentration of Jews at the time, many of whom perished in such German death camps as Sobibór, Majdanek, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau.

At the same time, what Polish history and the story of Philip Bialowitz told herein both offer are examples of survival against great odds with a message of redemption. This true account of the successful struggles of the brothers Philip and Symcha Bialowitz to survive and escape from the Nazi death camp at Sobibór is an inspiring example of the power of the human spirit. Most significantly, the mass escape of Jewish inmates and Russian POWs from Sobibór saw 200 individuals achieve freedom and led to the Nazis closing down the camp in which they had killed about 250,000 people. The aid given to Philip Bialowitz and other escapees by Polish civilians after their escape – at the risk of their own lives – provides a further inspiring look at humanity's capacity for heroism in dark times.

We owe a debt of gratitude to survivors and rescuers like Philip Bialowitz, Elie Wiesel, and Władysław Bartoszewski for sharing their stories with the world. They serve as a caution for why we must never forget the significance of the pledge "never again." They also show that the individual can make a difference even against apparently insurmountable odds, which keeps hope alive for all of us.

Thank you, Philip Bialowitz, for writing this book. And thank you, reader, for joining me in providing an audience for this important work, and for helping to keep alive the memory of how good has defeated evil in the past, and may yet again.

Sincerely yours,

Victor Ashe